**Crusades**

What are commonly referred to as "The Crusades" were actually one long, protracted conflict between Christian Europe and the [Islamic](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) Near East over the land and holy sites of modern-day [Palestine](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades). It was the several aggressive attempts by European nobility, at the behest of successive [popes](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), to reinforce the Latin kingdom or regain territory lost to Islam, that give the illusion of multiple invasions. Battles would continue to be fought, cities would be won and lost, but the great Christian victories of the [First Crusade](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) would not be repeated.  
  
During the seventh and eighth centuries, Islam swept out of the Near East, across North Africa, and into [Spain](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), where it began to encroach on central Europe. During the 10th century, European [Christianity](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) went on the offensive, and by the 11th century, the tide began to turn against Islam. Christian Europe meant not only to overthrow Muslim rule but also to expel it from Europe and recover [Jerusalem](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) for Christianity.  
  
Italian city-states exercised naval and commercial dominance, and the German empire was on the rise. Christianity was spreading into northern Europe, and the number of [pilgrimages](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) to the Holy Land and other sacred sites increased. The desire to spread the gospel was mixed with a desire to open new markets and conquer new territories. Despite the opportunity for war with the [Muslims](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), the [feudal](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) barons of central Europe engaged in private wars with one another. The need for peace compelled the pope to declare the [Peace of God](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), and later the [Truce of God](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), in a vain attempt to limit such conflict.  
  
By 1095, the power and influence of the papacy, as well as the sanctity of the majority of the clergy, were on the decline, while the power and influence of the German empire were on the rise. Pope [Urban II](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), fearing the Church would lose what little influence it had, and abhorring the results of continued infighting among the Christian nobility, sought a way to unite Christendom in a common cause. At the [Council of Clermont](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), he preached the First Crusade. It was a mixture of propaganda concerning the alleged cruelty of Muslims to Christian pilgrims; a request for aid by Byzantine emperor [Alexius I Comnenus](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades); a call for display of righteous action in the recovery of Jerusalem; and an offer of remission of sins for those who participated.  
  
The effect was overwhelming. Not only did the nobility—his prime audience—heed Urban's call, but so did many peasants and riffraff of the cities. Others also took to preaching the crusade, most notably [Peter the Hermit](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), whose call went mostly to peasants and street rabble. The nobility were led by [Godfrey of Bouillon](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), Raymond of Toulouse, and [Bohemond I](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades). Along with the peasants and rabble, they made up six hosts of 100,000 to 200,000*cruciata,* or cross-signed, who traveled overland to meet in [Constantinople](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) before continuing on to Jerusalem.  
  
The so-called Peasants' Crusade led by Peter the Hermit consisted primarily of peasants and petty criminals. It preceded the main contingents of nobility and men-at-arms and turned into a binge of pillage, thievery, and eventual widespread murder of innocent [Jews](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades). Many of Peter's "army" died at the hands of the [Turks](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), only a few ever reaching Constantinople.  
  
The main forces under command of the nobility reached Constantinople in 1096. The leaders were required to swear allegiance to Alexius, emperor of the [Byzantine Empire](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), in return for immediate gifts and a promise of future help, which was never forthcoming. Alexius' main objective was to get the crusaders to help him regain territories lost to the Turks, who were seeking to take over his empire. Before they were allowed to leave for Jerusalem, however, the crusaders were coerced into helping Emperor Alexius capture the city of Nicaea in 1097.  
  
The Muslim world was totally unprepared for the Christian invasion; the strength and power of the mounted knights, as well as the bravery of the common foot soldier, were more than a match for the Muslim [cavalry](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades). The march to Palestine was marked by a decisive victory at the [Battle of Dorylaeum](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) and the conquest of [Tarsus](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) by [Baldwin I](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) and [Tancred](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades). The crusaders and their camp followers were not prepared, however, for the long and arduous march through the Black Mountains toward [Antioch](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades). This journey meant the death of many through hunger, thirst, and heat. …  
  
After the [1099 siege of Jerusalem](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) and the securing of the surrounding territory, most of the crusaders returned home, feeling that they had done what was required of them by their God and their pope. Only the adventurers stayed on to establish the four [Crusader States](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades). These four states, the [Kingdom of Jerusalem](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) and the [vassal](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) states of the [County of Edessa](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), [Principality of Antioch](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), and eventually the [County of Tripoli](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), were islands of Christianity in a hostile sea of Islam.  
  
The Muslim world was now much more aware of the crusaders' presence and purpose, their strengths and weaknesses. The Muslims wasted little time in trying to regain what had been taken from them. Communications between the four Crusader States was difficult, if not impossible, and the Christians' only hope of survival lay in reinforcements from Europe. In the meantime, however, their strength, bravery, audacity, and faith would have to keep them alive and in possession of the holy sites and the fortified cities.  
 …..  
  
In 1198, Pope [Innocent III's](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) influence finally brought peace to the feuding nobility of Europe, and he tried to reestablish the[Fourth Crusade](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) as a holy cause. This crusade was led mainly by the [Venetians](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), whose only goal was to expand their trading empire by destroying the influence of Constantinople. This they did with the sacking of Constantinople in 1204 by the crusaders, whom the Venetians had starved into compliance after they could not afford their passage to the Holy Land.  
  
…..The Last Crusade was fought during 1443–1444. King Ladislas of [Poland](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) organized a group of Hungarians, Poles, Bosnians, Wallachians, and Serbians to expel the Muslims under [Murat II](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) from the Balkans. A Venetian fleet was to ferry the crusaders from Varna to Constantinople and then stop any Muslim reinforcements from crossing the Bosporus. The fleet failed, and Murat's army crushed the crusaders at the [Battle of Varna](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades). The Crusades were definitively over.  
  
The major military goals of the Crusades—driving Muslims from the Holy Land and imposing Western culture on the captured territory—were never accomplished. On the contrary, the Crusades strengthened and united the Islamic world and weakened the Byzantine Empire until it was overcome by the Turks in the 15th century. They succeeded, however, in accomplishing Pope Urban II's original goals of returning the papacy to its previous position of power and influence and eventually ending feudal warfare.  
  
In the Near East, the influence of Europe remained for some time to come. Italian merchants were able to establish trading privileges in the major ports of Acre and [Tyre](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades). By controlling the sea lanes of the [Mediterranean Sea](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), they provided Muslim merchants with access to European goods while remaining the sole distributors of Asian goods to the West. Italian traders were able to move and work freely in dedicated districts of these cities and gained some legal control over citizens and visitors within those districts. Their basic problem was that though they provided a conduit to the West, they could deal only with Muslim traders who handled Asian goods, mainly spices.  
  
The long-term consequences of the Crusades for the West were generally negative, as the high cost of foreign warfare impoverished the [aristocracy](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades). The population of Europe was depleted, and the [Catholic Church](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) lost much of its stature after successive defeats. In spite of its decreasing influence over the crusaders, however, the Church enjoyed a power rarely exercised before or since. Unfortunately, the power corrupted. The sale of [indulgences](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) and the exaction of [tithes](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades)led away from spirituality and into worldliness, which people like Martin Luther would later use as justification for the Protestant Reformation.  
  
There were some positive aspects for Europe, however. A sense of unity prevailed for a time under the banner of the Church. France, a struggling set of dukedoms and principalities, began unifying into a single country, although it would be fought over by internal and external factions for a long time to come. Although the [Knights Templar](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) and [Knights Hospitaler](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) suffered a severe decline, the [Teutonic Knights](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades) (another military order of monks) went to work fighting the Church's enemies in Eastern Europe and in so doing, laid the foundations for the countries of both Poland and Germany.  
  
The Crusades had a profound effect on commerce and trade, both inside and outside Europe. Feudalism and [serfdom](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades)disintegrated. A money economy began to predominate, which stimulated a need for banks. Spheres of influence were set up in port cities of Palestine by the trading powers of Venice, [Genoa](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), and [Pisa](http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/594509?terms=crusades), providing easier acquisition of goods from both the Near and Far East. Navigation and shipbuilding improved with the increased need for transportation of people and goods. But many of the developments attributed to the Crusades were merely the end result of changes that had begun before Pope Urban's call to retake the Holy Land. The Crusades served only to facilitate and accelerate them.

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